

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PINS, KS, KN, JA

SUBJECT: PARK ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT: REACTION AND POSSIBLE
CONSEQUENCES

1. GENERAL REACTION TO ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION OF
PRES PARK AND DEATH MRS. PARK HAS BEEN SOMBER AND
SUBDUED. THERE IS PUBLIC SADNESS AND SHOCK OVER MRS.
PARK'S DEATH. AS EVIDENCED BY MASSIVE AND BY NO MEANS
ENTIRELY CONTRIVED TURNOUT FOR HER FUNERAL, SHE WAS
GRACIOUS AND SYMPATHETIC FIGURE WIDELY RESPECTED EVEN
BY THOSE WHO OPPOSED HER HUSBAND.

2. THERE IS ALSO SYMPATHY FOR PRES PARK AND HIS FAMILY
AS WELL AS REALIZATION THAT ABORTIVE ASSASSINATION
ATTEMPT MIGHT WELL HAVE SUCCEEDED, LEAVING COUNTRY WITHOUT
ITS PRESENT LEADER. IN VIEW OF THOSE CLOSELY ASSOCIATED
WITH GOVERNMENT, HIS DEMISE WOULD HAVE PRECIPITATED
AT LEAST A PERIOD OF DEEP POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY,
IF NOT AN IMMEDIATE AND DISRUPTIVE INTERNAL
POWER STRUGGLE. ON OTHER HAND, SYMPATHY OF PARK'S
OPPONENTS IS TEMPERED AND ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION NOT
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CHANGED THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD PARK AND HIS POLICIES.

3. THERE IS NOW WIDESPREAD SPECULATION AS TO WHAT CONSEQUENCES OF THE ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION WILL BE, BOTH IN TERMS OF GOVERNMENT DOMESTIC POLICIES AND WITH REGARD NORTH KOREA AND JAPAN. PRES PARK REMAINS IN STATE OF DEEP GRIEF OVER HIS WIFE'S DEATH, AND WE HAVE GOTTEN CLEAR IMPRESSION FROM BLUE HOUSE AND PRIMIN'S OFFICE THAT PRESIDENT HAS BEEN ABSORBED AND REMOTE IN PAST DAYS. OUR SOURCES STATE PARK HAS NOT GIVEN ANY SIGNAL AS TO WHAT HIS REACTION WILL BE TO ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT.

4. THERE IS SOME SPECULATION THAT PARK'S WIFE'S DEATH MAY SHOCK HIM INTO ADOPTING MORE MODERATE, CONCILIATORY STANCE, EASING DOMESTIC PRESSURES. OTHER KOREAN OBSERVERS HOWEVER BELIEVE THIS IS WISHFUL THINKING. THEY POINT OUT IT HAS BEEN PARK'S CHARACTER TO REACT STRONGLY, NOT PASSIVELY, TO THREATS OR ACTIONS DIRECTED AGAINST HIM. SEVERAL CHRISTIAN SOURCES HOLD VIEW THAT PARK WILL CERTAINLY CONTINUE HIS REPRESSIVE POLICIES, USING PUBLIC SYMPATHIES OVER LOSS OF HIS WIFE AND ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION TO JUSTIFY HIS ACTIONS. THESE CHRISTIANS BELIEVE THAT PARK MAY SUCCEED IN THIS SINCE THERE IS AMONG GENERAL PUBLIC RENEWED CONVICTION THAT COMMUNIST THREAT CONTINUES. THESE CHRISTIAN LEADERS ALSO FEEL CAUGHT IN DILEMMA SINCE IT INAPPROPRIATE TO MOUNT ANTI-GOVT PROTEST ACTIVITIES IN IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF MRS. PARK'S DEATH. AT SAME TIME, CHRISTIAN LEADERS FEAR THAT IF THEY LAPSE INTO SILENCE FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME, MOMENTUM OF THEIR PRESENT OPPOSITION MOVEMENT MAY WELL COLLAPSE.

5. SO FAR WE HAVE NO INDEPENDENT INFORMATION REGARDING ROKG ANNOUNCEMENT THAT MRS. PARK'S KILLER MUN SE KWANG HAS CONFESSED TO BEING UNDER NORTH KOREAN AND/OR CHOSEN SOREN DIRECTION. ROKG WILL, AT THE LEAST, EXPLOIT MUN'S REPORTED CONFESSION BOTH IN DOMESTIC PROPAGANDA, AS JUSTIFICATION FOR ITS POLICIES, AND INTERNATIONALLY AS EVIDENCE OF THE NORTH KOREAN REGIME'S TREACHERY
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VIS-A-VIS THE ROK. ROKG MAY ALSO REFUSE DEAL WITH NORTH KOREANS AT PANMUNJOM FOR PRESENT. (AUG 21 SNCC MEETING HAS BEEN POSTPONED.) WE ARE WATCHING CAREFULLY FOR ANY SIGNS THAT ROKG MIGHT GO FURTHER AND CONSIDER SOME COUNTER-STROKE AGAINST NORTH. SO FAR NEITHER WE NOR UNC HAS RECEIVED ANY INDICATION THAT GOVERNMENT IS THINKING ALONG THAT LINE. WE REMAIN ALERT TO THIS POSSIBILITY.

6. WITH REGARD TO ROK-JAPAN RELATIONS, TANAKA'S GESTURE IN ATTENDING FUNERAL HAS BEEN APPRECIATED. HOWEVER, JAPANESE CONNECTION WITH ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT PROVIDES STILL ANOTHER POINT OF STRAIN IN RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THIS WILL PARTICULARLY BE TRUE SHOULD ROKG PRESS FOR ACTIONS AGAINST THE YOSHIIS AND CHOSEN SOREN OFFICIAL KIM HO-RYONG ON THE BASIS OF MUN'S CONFESSION.

7. WHILE AS NOTED ABOVE, WE HAVE NO CLEAR SIGNS ON WHAT DIRECTION PRESIDENT PARK WILL TAKE MUCH WILL DEPEND ON HIS STATE OF MIND. DEATH OF HIS WIFE AND RESIGNATION OF PPF COMMANDER PARK CHUNG-KYU HAVE REMOVED FROM SCENE TWO PERSONS ON WHOM HE HAS RELIED HEAVILY FOR PERSONAL SECURITY AND STABILITY. WE HAVE NO IDEA HOW THIS WILL AFFECT HIM PSYCHOLOGICALLY OVER THE LONGER TERM, BUT WE BELIEVE PARK'S FIRST REACTION WILL BE TO INTERPRET ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION AS JUSTIFICATION FOR HIS POLICIES AND PROOF OF NECESSITY FOR STRONG CONTROLS. WE DO NOT SEE PARK MOVING TOWARD MODERATION; RATHER, WE EXPECT HIM TO BE MORE CONVINCED THAN EVER THAT FIRM, FORCEFUL MEASURES ARE NECESSARY FOR THE NATION'S SECURITY AND HIS OWN. WHETHER HE WILL INCREASE REPRESSIVE MEASURES REMAINS TO BE SEEN. HOWEVER, WE EXPECT THAT PRESENT COERCIVE DOMESTIC ATMOSPHERE WILL AT THE MINIMUM CONTINUE.

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